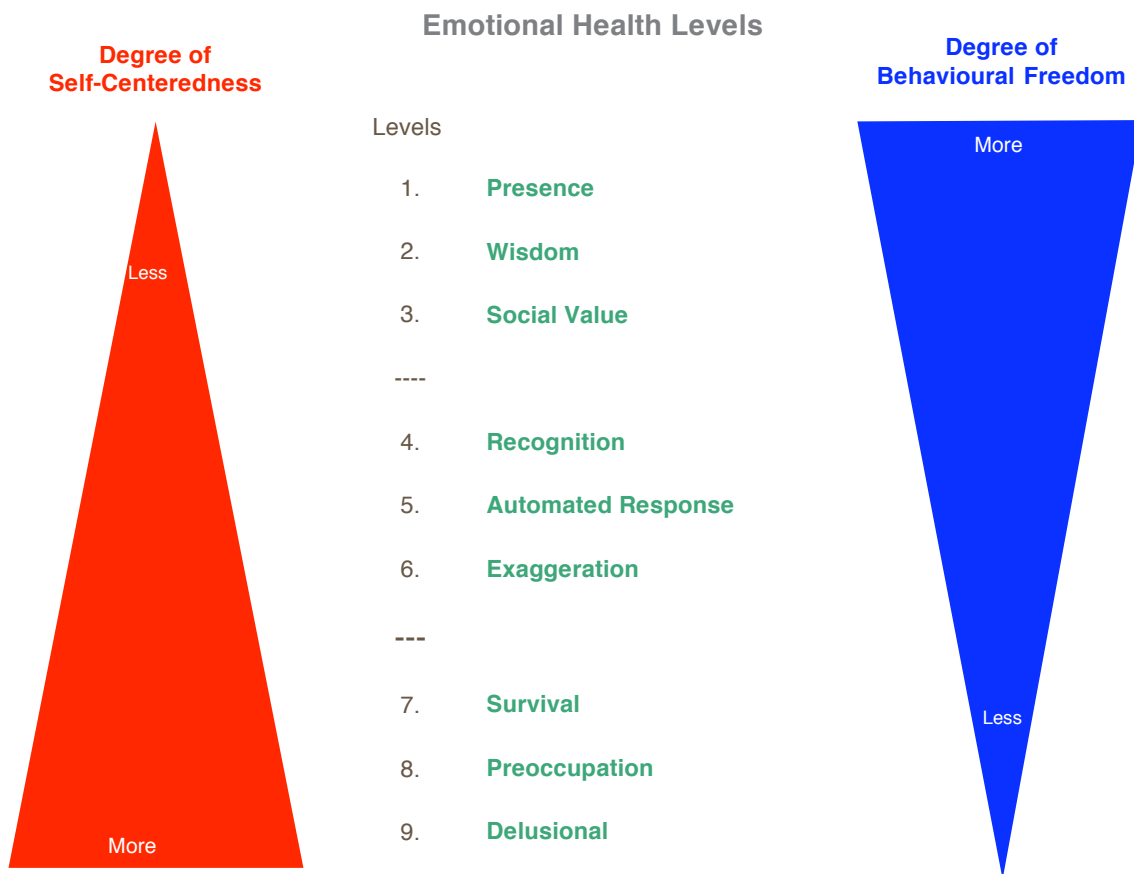


### Emotional Health Levels

Emotional health levels are an important conceptual framework that helps us understand ourselves and others behaviours, as well as giving us valuable insights into this area. This concept is based on the work of Riso & Hudson 1999.

The Figure 1a (below), is a diagrammatical representation of the key elements and includes the name for each of the health levels.



Adapted from the Copyrighted Work of Don Riso and Russ Hudson 2005

### Using Emotional Health Levels to Understand Yourself and Others

The best way to describe the application of this model is for us to look at it broadly and then explore the detail of each of the various levels.

First, lets look at a hypothetical person who is centred at Level 5 – “Automated Response”. This level would be the average of the Australian population in general, so is a great place to start.

At this level, a person would exhibit a range of behaviours that are thought about and considered and a range of behaviours that are “automated responses” as a result of how they believe people are treating them.

Ironically, it is most often our loved ones who know which “hot buttons” to push to elicit these automated responses. Whilst we would prefer not to “own up” to them, these automated responses are defence mechanisms and part of an overall coping strategy we adopt to ensure our personal needs met.

The amount of automated responses we hold determines the “Degree of Self-Centeredness” i.e. the more automated responses we have the less opportunity we have to mindfully choose other behaviours when our “hot buttons” are pushed.

If we accept that at Level 5, some of our responses are automated and are therefore not thought about, then the ability to choose from a range of more appropriate behaviours i.e. “Degree of Behavioural Freedom” is limited. How often do we do things without thinking about or considering the most appropriate action?

To give you an idea of the vast spread of behaviours through the Emotional Health Levels, you will find that people at Level 9 are often fixated, delusional, self destructive and are generally under medical/psychiatric care (or need to be). On the other hand, people at Level 1 are described as being open, well balanced and liberated from any degree of self-centredness and with complete behavioural freedom.

As people move up the Emotional Health Levels, they are able to clearly see other perspectives of the world they live in and start to understand the assumptions that their own world- view is built on. This helps them better appreciate that the coping strategies and defence mechanisms they are using are not helping them grow and develop. In fact, they tend to keep them stagnated in their current position or situation.

As our awareness of this situation becomes more active we can actually “observe” ourselves in action with these coping strategies and defence mechanisms. We are able to identify areas of behaviour we need to work on and plan consciously and with increased commitment to continue our development.

### ***Lets look at this from a leadership perspective***

In organisations, whether not-for-profit, corporate, government or private business, there is a constant push to improve the effectiveness and efficiency in what they do. One of the keys to this is through improving leadership within the organisation.

To improve leadership skills, a number of things are done – in particular, leadership development courses are conducted along with identifying the leadership competencies/skills that are needed for the organisation. In many cases the leadership competencies are developed in conjunction with external sources who have conducted research into the skills and attributes of proven successful and effective leaders. These competencies then become the benchmark for leaders within that organisation.

When we analyse these competencies, more often than not we find that the degree of behavioural freedom required to be competent is high. That is, leaders are expected to be able to demonstrate significantly constructive behaviours at both ends of the spectrum i.e. compassionate and caring as well as strong and decisive – characteristics of those at high Emotional Health Levels (Levels 1, 2 and 3).

Leaders at these higher emotional health levels drive positive emotions in the workplace and create resonance by inspiring others through creating a shared vision and coaching them to be all that they can be toward achieving that vision.

Moving up the Emotional Health Levels requires more than acknowledging that this is “a good thing to do”. Becoming aware of your “automated responses” and their impact on others, understanding what drives and motivates your behaviour and why this is the case and consciously choosing and actioning development paths that move you towards “Presence” (see Emotional Health Descriptors) are all part of the leadership journey.

## **Emotional Health Descriptors**

### **Level 1 – *Presence***

At this level we have a quiet mind and fully in touch with the present moment or the “now”. We are happiness. We have total behavioural freedom. We are “present” in all we do – the moment we are in is the most important and we are fully available.

### **Level 2 – *Wisdom***

At this level we have long periods of being “present”, however there is still an attachment to the false perceptions that have driven our coping strategy and defence mechanisms. We are much more conscious of these detracting moments and are able to keep them under control, however they still exist.

### **Level 3 - *Social Value***

At this level, we have greater balance in our lives and start to move our concerns to others and broader social interests. As we start to lose more of our “self-centredness” there is a natural tendency to embrace the “greater good” for our community/communities. We also start to increase the number of opportunities to be “present” and further understand how to use our “inner observer” to further raise our own consciousness.

### **Level 4 – *Recognition***

At this level we start to recognise that we have choices with all of our behaviours and begin to observe them on a more regular basis. Our level of consciousness increases as we begin to observe ourselves more often. We also start to recognise that we can start to create moments of “presence” under certain circumstances. We still use and find it easy to fall back into our defense mechanisms and coping strategies and need to constantly work at moving away from them.

### **Level 5 - *Automated Response***

At this level we are dominated by a range of automated responses to what is occurring around us. These responses are mostly defensive and are about controlling our environment (including the people in it) in trying to get our perceived needs met. There are still times when we do make decisions about our behaviours, however the automated responses tend to take over in the moment.

### **Level 6 – *Exaggeration***

At this level we start to be more “demonstrative” in our defences, with our behaviours being exaggerated as we over-compensate in response to our internal conflicts and anxieties. The majority of responses occur automatically without thinking or from our mind taking over from a distorted perspective.

### **Level 7 – *Survival***

At this level our internal feelings become intolerable as we start to realise that our defence mechanisms are not working. We now start to employ a survival tactic as a self-protective response. We have started to lose all control over making reasonable choices and become fixated on the survival tactic we have chosen.

### **Level 8 – *Preoccupation***

At this level we start to lose touch with reality, and our thinking, feeling, perceiving and behaviours all become severely distorted. We are out of control, and this is considered to be a full pathological state.

### **Level 9 - *Delusional***

At this level we are delusional, and out of touch with reality and willing to destroy others and ourselves. This includes states of extreme psychosis where we are totally uncontrollable and unreasonable. Our mind obsessions take over our life completely.